

Sociolinguistic Survey Report on the Chara Language of Ethiopia

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1. Introduction

Chara or s'ara is one of the least-known Omotic languages spoken in Kefa administrative region. The Chara live in Ch'och'a area scattered in three different villages: *geba_a meša*, *buna anta* and *kumba*. Chara population is estimated about 7,000.

2. Phonology

2.1 Consonants

stops vd	b	d		g	
vl	p	t		k	? /?
ejective	p'	t'		k'	
implosive	b'	(d')			
Fricatives	[f]	s	š		h
Affricates vd			j		
vl		ts	tʃ		
ejective		s'	tʃ'		
Nasals	m	n	[ɲ]		
Lateral		l			
Trill		r			
Semi-vowel	w		y		

In the phonemic inventory of the Chara language ten stops /b ,p',b', d, t, t', g, k, k', ?/, four fricatives /f, s, š, h/, five affricates /ts, s', j, tʃ, tʃ'/, two nasals /m, n/, a lateral /l/, a trill /r/, and two semi-vowels /w, y/, altogether 25 consonants are found. The phonemic inventory presented here differs from Cerulli's article published in 1938. The alveolar implosive /d'/, which is included in Cerulli's

¹An earlier version of this report appeared as "Some Notes on the Chara Language: sound system and noun morphology," Survey of Little-know Languages of Ethiopia (S.L.L.E.) Linguistic Report 32, July 1995. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Summer Institute of Linguistics.

²The underscored space indicates missing data.

³This estimation was given by Alemayehu Ambo, a contact person between the Chara and the government officials in the area.

phonemic inventory has been found only once alternating with the glottalized alveolar stop /t'/: [jold'a] [jolt'a] ‘crooked’. The bilabial implosive /b'/, which has not been mentioned in Cerulli’s inventory, occurs at least in five lexical items and is considered as a distinctive phoneme in this study. The voiced alveopalatal fricative [ʒ] is extremely rare. Only two items consisting of [ʒ] have been found out of around 550 lexical items. In both cases [ʒ] occurs word medially following the vowel /i/ and preceding /a/. In Cerulli’s analysis [p] and [f] are also considered two distinctive phonemes. But my data shows that the two consonants are in free variation.

Moreover, Cerulli has included two more consonants /n/ and /y/, which he refers to as ‘dei fonimi con occlusions glottale’ and occur intervocally in one item each: to:ya ‘foot’, sinän ‘nose’. In my data the semivowel /y/ occurs preceded by a glottal stop: /toʔya/ or compensatory lengthening the vowel /o/ after deleting the glottal stop: /to:ya/. The comparison of the two items containing /n/ in Cerulli’s data with the corresponding items in my own shows that /n/ occurs before a glottalized alveolar stop /t'/: sinän vs. sint'a. In the second item the glottal release /n/ of Cerulli corresponds to the glottal stop in my material: nanza vs. naʔa ‘child’.

Another difference is the occurrence of the alveolar implosive stop /d'/. Comparison of the items which contain /d'/ in Cerulli’s material shows correspondence with /t'/ in my vocabulary list: hayd' vs. hayt' ‘listen’, wod' vs. wot' ‘kill’. The omission of the voiceless glottalized stop /p'/ in Cerulli’s phonemic inventory is difficult to explain. Eleven lexical items have been found containing /p'/ in my vocabulary list. This discrepancy may be attributed to dialectal variation in the Chara language.

Another consonant which has not been included in Cerulli’s phonemic inventory is the bilabial implosive stop /b'/. In my list /b'/ occurs in five lexical items.

2.2 Vowels

Chara has a five vowel system /i, e, a, u, o/. The short and long vowels are minimally contrastive.

Examples:

mola	‘fish’	buna	‘flower’
mo:la	‘egg’	bu:na	‘coffee’
masa	‘to wash’		
ma:sa	‘leopard’		

The mid central vowel [ä] seems an allophone of /a/, and it occurs at word medial position when the syllable is unstressed.

Examples:

zäkká	‘elephant’	bäk'á	‘to slap’
bälá	‘forehead’	tämä	‘fire’
märgá	‘fence’		

The language allows two or three clusters in word medial and final positions. The alveolar sonorants /n, l, r/ occur most frequently as first members of clusters. Clusters with the stops /t, t', k, k', ʔ/, the nasals /n, m/, and the alveolar fricative /s/ as second members are relatively more frequent than the other phonemes. Three consonant sequences (CCC) with the last member /n/, /s/, or /t/ occur in root morphemes or across a morpheme boundary.

Examples:

doklsa	‘circumcize’	p'irk'na	‘open’
aštna	‘hide!’	go_ñti ⁴	‘pick (pl.)!’

Three consonant sequences (clusters) with the last member as /r/ are also found in root nouns.

Examples:

funt'ra	‘naked’
antra	‘peas’

2.3 Suprasegmental

At the present state of my analysis, Chara seems to be a stress language. The following examples illustrate that stress is phonemic in the language.

bak'á	‘empty’
wóya	‘to come’
bák'a	‘to slap’
woyá	‘wolf’

⁴The underscored space indicates missing data.

2.4 Morphophonemics

2.4.1 Assimilation

In Chara, assimilation may take place across a morpheme boundary. A morpheme-initial nasal assimilates its point of articulation to that of a preceding consonant. This consonantal process is usually observed when the singular imperative morpheme {-na} is suffixed to verbs.

Examples: /hayt'-na/ → [hayt'na] 'listen!'
to listen-imp.

/ŋ'ada-na/ → [ŋ'adna] 'stab!'
to stab-imp.

/k'era-na/ → [k'erra] 'circle!'
to circle-imp.

/boŋa-na/ → [boŋŋa/ dance!'
to dance-imp.

/dub-na/ → [dubma] 'hit!'
to hit-imp.

/uša-na/ → [ušša] 'drink!'
to drink-imp.

/sunk'a-na → [sunk'ŋa] 'kiss!'

/boka-na/ → [bokŋa] 'throw!'

3. Noun Morphology

3.1 Noun Inflection

Chara nouns are inflected for gender, number, definiteness, case, and possessive. The inflections are expressed through suffixes, except for the possessive which is always marked by prefixes.

3.1.1 Gender

Gender is usually expressed by using distinctive lexical items.

Examples:

mansa	‘ox’	ʔiši	‘older brother/uncle’
miya	‘cow’	mitʃa	‘older sister’

There are a few items in which I found the masculine noun marked by the suffix *-i*, and the feminine noun by *-a*:

Examples:

geši	‘younger brother’	izi	‘he’
geša	‘younger sister’	iza	‘she’

3.1.2 Number

Chara singular nouns are unmarked for number. The plural is expressed by suffixing *-endi* to singular nouns.

Examples:

	Singular	Plural
‘ox’	mansa	manse:ndi
‘cow’	miya	miye:ndi
‘mother’	ina	ine:ndi

Adjectives which are treated in this analysis as a class of substantives are inflected for number.

Examples:		Singular	Plural
	‘white’	dala	dale:ndi
	‘black’	karta	karte:ndi

3.1.3 Definiteness

Definiteness is designated by attaching the morpheme *nazi* for the masculine singular nouns and *-ena* for the feminine ones. The morpheme *nazi* also means ‘the male/man’.

mansa	‘ox’	mansana:zi	‘the ox’
miya	‘cow’	miyena	‘the cow’

Adjectives are marked for definiteness by the suffix *-bi* for masculine and *-ena* (which is identical with the feminine noun’s definite marker) for feminine.

dala	‘white’	karta	‘black’
dalabi	‘the white (masc.)’	kartabi	‘the black (masc.)’
dalena	‘the white (fem.)’	kartena	‘the black (fem.)’

Plural nouns or adjectives are not marked for definiteness.

3.1.4 Case

The cases found are nominative, accusative, dative, genitive, ablative, instrumental, and vocative.

The nominative case marker is *-i*:

kemeti polisene wot'isen
 ‘Kemeto was killed by a policeman’

The accusative is indicated by the suffix *-is* or *-s*.

izi kan-is wot'iš
 he dog-Acc. kill-past
 ‘he killed a dog’

kemet-i ta-s gas'iš
 Kemeto-Nom. I-Acc. hit-past
 'Kemeto hit me'

As shown in the above examples, *-is* occurs following a consonant and *-s* occurs following a vowel.

The dative case is marked by the suffix *-(i)ri*.

tane ganayen-ri atfa ebam-iš
 we old woman-Dat. meat take-past
 'we took meat to the old woman'

na?-t'aze mans-iri dara im-iš
 boy-Def. ox-Dat. sorghum give-past
 'the boy gave sorghum to ox'

The genitive is marked by *-e*.

aklil-e dorsa
 Aklilu-Gen. horse
 'Aklilu's horse'

kan-e atfa
 dog-Gen. tooth
 'dog's tooth'

If there is no possessed noun, the morpheme *-ri* follows the possessor noun and the genitive case marker *-e*.

aklileri 'Aklilu's'
kaneri 'dog's'

Ablative is indicated by *-kay*.

izi mizan-k'ay woy-iš
 he Mizan-Abl. come-past
 'he came from Mizan'

iza keti-k'ay kes-iš
 she house-Abl. get out-past
 'she got out from the house'

The instrumental case morpheme is *-ne*.

izi kats-en gas¹-iš
 he stick-Inst. hit-past
 ‘he hit with a stick’

ats-ena tary-en ha:miša
 person-Def.(fem) foot-Inst. went
 ‘the woman went by foot’

The vocative case marker is *-o*.

ta-ʔišo
 my-brother-Voc.
 ‘oh! my brother (older)’

ta-ba:b-o
 my father-Voc.
 ‘oh! my father’

3.2 Adjectives

Like nouns, all adjectives end with the vowel /a/ and are inflected for number, definiteness, plurality, and case. In noun phrases, adjectives precede the head noun they modify, but show no agreement in gender, number, definiteness, or case. The following are typical adjectives of Chara.

dala	‘white’	dale:ndi	‘whites’
dalabi	‘the red (masc.)’	dale:na	‘the red (fem.)’
dale mansa hayiš	‘the white ox died’	dale miyena hayiš	‘the white cow died’

3.3 Pronouns

3.3.1 Independent Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
1st	tani	no:ne/nuni
2nd	ne:ni	intí
3rd masc.	izi	itsendi
fem.	iza	

3.3.2 Possessive Pronouns

tareri	'mine'	ta-miya	'my cow'
nereri	'yours'	ne-miya	'your cow'
izeri	'his'	izä-miya	'his cow'

3.3.3 Wh-Pronouns

o:		'who?'
o:ne		'who is?'
o:ne nat'azis gas'išeri		'who hit the boy?'
o:s		'whom?'
o:s koytobi		'whom do you want?'
o:reri		'whose?'
o: kane		'whose dog is it?'
ameši		'where?'
am hamobi		'where are you going?'
ama:bi		'which (masc.)?'
ama:bis mansa koytobi		'which ox do you want?'
amena		'which (fem.)?'
amena miya koytobi		'which cow do you want?'
a:ze		'what?'
a:ze		'what is?'
na:zi a: ebammenne		'what did the man take?'
a:mata		'when?'
amata wo:ʔonne		'when did you come?'
a:rara		'how?'

a:rara hayenne	‘how did he die?’
a:siri	‘why?’
a:siri woryenne	‘why did you come?’
arare/ambitse	‘how much?’
arare/ambitse waga	‘how much is the price?’

4. The S.L.L.E. 320-Item Word List of Chara

hair (of head)	kúsna?
head	to:yá
forehead	bála
ear	wó:ya
hear!	hayt'na
mouth	no:ná
blow!	fúg-na
whistle!	sózt'-
sing!	botʃ-s
dance!	tóš/t'óš
drum	kúlal
lip	no:ná
tooth	átʃ'a
tongue	ʒins'ila
saliva	tʃudá
sweat	tʃ'oyá/tʃ'owá
chin	bútʃa
beard	s'a:rá
nose	sínt'u
smell (v)	sínk'-
eyebrow	de:ma
eye	á:pa
see	bé?-
weep	yép-
tear (of eye)	ás'ida

neck	borká
shoulder	gála
breast	t'áma/d'áma
belly	ʔi:na
navel	gúʔla
guts	ʔims'ila/ma:ye k'ítʃ'a
back	tánta
buttocks	t'usa/d'usa
knee	k'uma
elbow	k'asna/usna
foot	tá:ya
sandals	šabra
thigh	durma
hand	kutʃá
forearm	mut'á
fingernail	š'úgna
skin	gongá
bone	mertá
heart	ma:ya
blood	sú:ta
liver	ma:yá
bush	górma
thorn	á:ma
tree	mítsa
axe	kálta
bark of tree	góngá/gúrʔa
root	s'áb'a
leaf	wúya
rope	gaʔdá
basket	k'ártʃ'a
seed	dúk'a
harvest	góša/énta
machete	máša péda
hoe	gašta
dig	góš-

plant	tóg-
maize	balká
tobacco	túmba?
grass	dúya
weed	kúya
flower	guná
fruit	á:ba
ripe	k'ás'-, ek'k'ásiš /yäbässälä/
rotten	wók'a
meat	átʃa
cut	túnk-
steal	wúk'-, wúk'a (N)
give	ʔín
fat	kúwa
egg	mó:la
hide	átʃ-
hungry	gápa
cook	kátsa
eat!	ná-na
drink!	úš-ša
cup	kúbaya (Amh.)
gourd	go:zá
laugh	mítʃ'-
vomit	tʃ'óša
cough	óntʃa
spit!	tʃ'úd-
sneeze	yéd'irš-
sick	bärs-
fall	wót'-
die	háy-
grave	dúk'-
fool	árkay (think-there is no)
one	issá
two	nántá
three	e:zá

four	obdá
five	utʃ'á
six	sápma
seven	lápma
eight	nandirsá
nine	bitʃá
ten	tánsa
twenty	nantánsa
hundred	s'é:ta
man	átsa
think!	élk'-na
wife	komtá
marry	wóšt-
wedding	diggisa (Amh.)
bear	gét-
woman	mašná
father	ba:bí
say!	díʔen
mother	ʔi:na
ask	ótʃ'-
child	náʔa
brother (older)	iši
brother (younger)	geša
walk	s'álm-
run!	wós'-
rest	šóyt-
sister	inena/mítʃa
teach	tamars-
chief	úkura/tata (balabat)
God	yé:ri
name	sumá
animal	gá:za
fur	gá:za kúsna
hunter	adañ (Amh.)
hunt	kotnham-iš

pig	gútna
tail	s'éra
bat	úntaga
louse	tʃ'utʃ'á
ant	k'á:tʃ'a
worm	dúnk'a
fly	ús'la
spider	fitsila
termite	oltá
termite hill	oltá ké:ta
honey bee	mäs'á
beehive	bäzá
honey	?é:sa
goat	gošá
horn	úša
cow	miyá
donkey	kúra
hit	gás'-
chicken	díra
bird	káfa
claw	š'úgna
wing	k'ása
feather	kúsna
fly	wól-
nest	káfa ké:ta (Literally, house of a bird)
snake	šóša
rat	ús'a
kill	wót'-
fish	molá
scorpion	k'ongók
fishnet	dapá
swim	wát'-
frog	góbra
thread	mátaba
sew	dád-

tie	túts-
crocodile	gúra
fear	ʔítʃ¹-
buffalo	gá:sa
monkey	ʔáysa
leopard	ma:sá
cat	s'úra
hyena	wúlaza
dog	kána
listen	háyt¹-
bark (N)	gongá
bark (V)	kút-
come	wóy-
bite	sás¹-
banana	múza
want	kóyt-
count!	pád-
take!	ʔébam-
hold!	ob-
path (foot road)	tá:ya búka
house	ké:ta
door	fúrkata
sweep!	zír-
enter	k'ár-
exit	kéz-
stool	šákama
make (N)	kíta
sit!	kalm-ne/utna
stand	aš-ne/neyt¹na
salt	je:gá
pot	óta
fire	táma
burn	mítʃ¹-
hot	k'és¹-
cold (air)	tʃ¹alká

cold (water)	šátʃa
smoke	tʃ'úya
ashes	bénda
stick	kátsa
stone	šutʃá
smooth	šúpa
earth	dúk'a
mud	tolá
clay	óta
sand	ámša
dust	kérda
gold	ansá
silver	bíra
money	šatʃa
buy!	k'óšša
sell!	k'óšša
market	gāba
mountain	mú:ta
wind	tʃúba
cloud	túgna
rain	í:ra
rainbow	pupus/wóškis
lightning	dá:da
thunder	zílma
dew	k'a:šá
river	kó:ba
canoe	góngga
bridge	hatʃá
water	á:s'a
well of water	á:se dotʃa šítʃa {minc'}
hot	k'ts'ab
lake	sálma
sky	sá:ka
night	únta
moon	dóza

star	wóntʃeta
sun	oyá
white	dälá
black	kártá
red	zúwa [z ^w a]
green	tʃ'íla
yellow	tótʃ'ära
brown	zúwabatʃ'a
knife	máša
sharp	ká:ra
dull	molá
bow	mo:ga
arrow	láwda
spear	me:tá
throw	kós-
shield	gá:sa
war	ésta
fight	tʃ'ádit-
bad	gántʃa
good	ónsa
wide	a:gá
narrow	s'úp'a/jí:ma (thin)
straight	íškodar
crooked	jólt'a/jóld'a
long	b'ädá/b'äd'á
short	k'óyna
big	mé:sa
small	gútsa
thick	dus'á
thin	jí:ma
heavy	ba:yá
light	kó:sa/kó?sa
old	gänä
new	ká:ya
all	fítta

none	káyay
left	ádira
right	útʃira
yes	ʔa:
no	éri káye
hard	mína
soft	šupá
many	bordá
few	gútsa
up	bóliyu
down	to:rá
this	háribe
that	sékn/sékän
who?	ó:ne
whose?	ariwán
what?	á:ze
when?	amitá
yesterday	zína
where?	ámne
here	á:ni
how?	á:ra
why?	á:siri
clothing	máyta
wet	tʃ'íla
dry	kó:la
dirty	gäntʃá
garbage	
pour!	šák'-
empty	kó:la
full	s'os'á
bathe	más
lie	gétik-
yawn	šók'-
sleep	gí?-
I	táni

you	néni
he	ízi
she	íza
we	núni
you (pl.)	ínti
they	ítsendi
push!	t'úrk'-
pull!	gáz-
jump	t'ól-
road	boká
fence	märgá
gate	kelá (Amh.)
all	úräri
scratch	k'átj'-
and	-ne
at	-n
go	hám-
know	ár-
other	yékäri

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